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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000072

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SUBJECT: RUSSIA RECEPTIVE TO OSCE/UNOMIG COMPROMISE;

PRESSES ON GAS; REJECTS ABKHAZ BORDER REVISION

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 14 meeting to brief on the U.S.-Georgia Charter, MFA Fourth CIS Director Kelin welcomed the recent compromise formula proposed by Greece to establish branch OSCE offices in Tskhinvali and Tbilisi, with the mission headquartered in Vienna, although he flagged Russian opposition to the proposed names. Arguing it was not "in anyone's interest" to shutter the OSCE, Kelin also maintained that Russia saw the benefit of a continued UNOMIG presence and speculated that a similar compromise could be reached. He did not rule out a technical rollover of the UNOMIG mandate, in the event serious negotiations were underway. Kelin appealed for U.S. assistance in resolving the gas cutoff to South Ossetia, reiterating Gazprom assurances of the pipeline's operability, which he maintained that an OSCE expert also had confirmed. Conceding that the Geneva meetings will extend beyond February, Kelin argued for their reduced frequency, with stepped up activity by mediators. Kelin confirmed that Russia would reject any efforts by the Abkhaz to extend its "borders" beyond Soviet administrative boundaries. End Summary.

U.S.-Georgia Charter

¶2. (C) In a January 14 meeting to review the recently concluded U.S.-Georgia Charter, MFA Fourth CIS Director Andrei Kelin did not repeat concerns raised by Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Sergei Kislyak in his January 9 meeting with DAS David Merkel. Instead, Kelin questioned whether the Charter was patterned on U.S. bilateral efforts to prepare the Baltic states for NATO membership. We responded that the Charter was faithful to the Administration's policy of supporting NATO membership for Georgia, underscoring the bipartisan support for Georgian territorial integrity and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

OSCE Monitors Needed

¶3. (C) In contrast to previous meetings where Russian skepticism towards the viability of an OSCE monitoring mission inside South Ossetia had been stressed, Kelin welcomed the latest compromise formula put forth by the Greek OSCE chairmanship in Vienna on January 13. (Kelin's tone was in line with a January 13 MFA statement, where DFM Karasin emphasized the role of the OSCE in resolving the South Ossetian gas dispute, during a meeting with South Ossetian "Ambassador" Medoyev.) Stressing that it was "not in anyone's interest" to fully terminate the OSCE mission in Georgia, Kelin expressed interest in the proposal to create OSCE branch offices in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, with a field presence of eight and 20 observers respectively, reporting to a mission headquartered in Vienna. Russia could "work on that basis," although Kelin underscored that the current

Greek formulation for the names of the mission branches was unacceptable. An "OSCE Mission to Tskhinvali" had to parallel an "OSCE Mission to Tbilisi" (and not, as Greece proposed, an "OSCE Mission to Georgia"). Kelin evinced confidence that the South Ossetians would follow Russia's lead in supporting a compromise format.

UNOMIG Compromise Possible

¶4. (C) Speaking "preliminarily," Kelin suggested that a compromise along the lines proposed for the OSCE could be envisioned for the UNOMIG mission in Abkhazia. When pressed, Kelin maintained that Russia benefited from both the UNOMIG and OSCE presence, since Russia had "influence" in both international bodies. In contrast, he expressed frustration over the EUMM, questioning the capacity of the unarmed EU observers, their restricted mandate, and their ability to exert control when there was no agreement with Georgia limiting troop levels. Kelin did not rule out a technical rollover of the UNOMIG mandate, in the event that discussions were underway on a compromise formula, noting that it would take time to renegotiate mission parameters and navigate Georgian redlines on territorial integrity. However, Kelin underscored that a technical rollover was not Russia's preference. Noting that UN Representative for Georgia Johann Verbeke had submitted several suggestions for a new UNOMIG mandate, Kelin said it was premature to predict Russia's position in advance of the February 5 discussions. While complaining about the lack of cooperation between UNOMIG, OSCE and EU observers, Kelin was skeptical that the EU would

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agree to uniting the EU and UNOMIG missions under the UN umbrella, and said Verbeke's suggestion to establish a full-scale peacekeeping mission would be rejected by Abkhazia.

Gas: Georgia Stonewalling

¶5. (C) Kelin reiterated Russian appeals for U.S. assistance in ensuring the resumption of gas flows to South Ossetia. Rejecting claims the pipeline had been successfully tested, Kelin asserted that only air and not gas had been sent through the pipes. He pointed to the analysis of an Austrian gas expert accompanying OSCE Ambassador Christopoulos to South Ossetia, who had examined the pipeline and found it undamaged. Kelin stressed that Gazprom experts had made all necessary repairs in October 2008 along the 7 km stretch of pipeline and stood by its security guarantee. Noting that South Ossetia had already paid the bill Georgia had submitted for gas at the price of \$400 per thousand cubic meters, Kelin castigated Georgia's failure to resume gas deliveries as unacceptable. He affirmed that the resumption of gas deliveries, as well as the spring 2009 provision of potable water to Georgian villages, was a humanitarian issue, but pressed for security guarantees for OSCE experts to complete a comprehensive survey. Kelin maintained that he had personally seen copies of the letters South Ossetian "deputy prime minister" Boris Chochiev, extending security guarantees to the experts.

¶6. (C) Kelin charged that Tbilisi's more pragmatic approach to Abkhazia was matched by intransigence towards South Ossetia. Stating that Georgia had made 27 exclusions to its ban on economic activity by Georgian firms on Abkhaz territory (including the agreement with RAO UES to manage the Enguri electricity plant), Kelin noted that Tbilisi had yet to make any for Georgian gas exporters to operate inside South Ossetia. Kelin argued that this was a problem the U.S. and Russia could settle.

Geneva Process Will Continue

¶7. (C) Outlining next steps on Georgia, Kelin listed the upcoming visits to Moscow by EU special envoy Pierre Morel January 28-29 and chief of the EU investigation commission Heidi Tagliavini February 3-4, followed by Morel visits to Tbilisi, Tskhinvali, and Sukhumi before the next round of Geneva talks February 17-18. In the meantime, Kelin warned, South Ossetian "foreign minister" Murat Dzhioyev would visit Moscow January 20 on his first "official" visit, in order to exchange instruments of ratification of the Russia-South Ossetia "Big Treaty" and sign an MOU between the Russian and South Ossetian foreign ministries, similar to Abkhaz "foreign minister" Shamba's visit December 22-23, 2008.

¶8. (C) Kelin walked back his December statements in Geneva that the February round of talks should be the last. While substantive talks should continue, he conceded, they should do so at a reduced frequency, with mediators working more between the meetings to secure concrete results. Kelin underlined that the talks should not become a permanent institution. He expressed hope that a paper on the proposed "Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism" could be agreed at the February meeting.

Abkhaz Border Fixed

¶9. (C) In response to our strong concern over the October 2008 Abkhaz "Parliament" announcement defining the southern "border" of Abkhazia as the Enguri River, Kelin stressed that Russia already had rejected Abkhaz claims when it pressured the leadership in September 2008 to cede the parcels of territory at the northern and southern ends of Enguri river. When pressed to further clarify Russia's position in light of the subsequent Abkhaz announcement, Kelin confirmed that Russia would reject any efforts by Abkhazia to redraw the borders or make territorial gains beyond the Soviet administrative boundaries recognized by Moscow as the new "borders."

Comment

¶10. (C) Kelin's tone marks a sharp departure from our previous sessions. As conflicts mount and the need for

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regular mediation between all the parties becomes more apparent, Russia may be prepared to exert more pressure on the South Ossetia leadership to meet the demands of the August 12 Agreement.

RUBIN